THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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American Embassy,
Guatemala, January 5, 1954.

OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

SECRET

Dear Ray:

Enclosed are two memoranda of remarks made by Colonel Anselmo Getella, an officer in the Guatemalan Army, in conversations on December 26 and December 31, indicating that he is very much concerned about recent developments in Guatemala. These memoranda were prepared by Mr. George Plihal, a British subject of Czech origin, long resident in Guatemala. Mr. Plihal was present in a group at a cocktail party including Colonel Getella when the conversation of December 26 took place, while the conversation of the 31st was reported to him by Sr. Enrique Engel, a Guatemalan businessman who received his information from his son-in-law, Sr. Ricardo Herrera, who participated in the conversation.

Colonel Getella has an outstanding reputation for honesty and firmness. He served with the Guatemalan police force, the Guardia Civil, for several years under General Ubico and was director of the Guardia Civil for several months in 1951. From August 1951 to September 1953 he was Chief of the Presidential Staff, where he was in command of the military forces guarding the President, and he has in recent years also been assigned to a number of tasks in which he was called upon to clean up situations in which the degree of political corruption and mismanagement had become intolerable even for the present Guatemalan Government. In the latter part of 1952 and in early 1953, he was in charge of the liquidation of the consumer's cooperative of the railway workers union SAMF which had been pilfered into bankruptcy by union leaders, and in the early part of 1953 he also

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carried out the liquidation of the mismanaged Department for the Development of Cooperatives of the Ministry of Finance. At about the same time he was assigned to the task of cleaning up and liquidating the National Farms Administration which was notorious for its corruption. At the present time he represents the Guatemalan Government in overseeing the construction of the port of Santo Tomás.

An interesting fact about Colonel Getella is that he is respected by President Arbenz and has ready access to him. This relationship with the President goes back to the time when Arbenz entered the local military academy, the Escuela Politecnica, and was given a serial number exactly 100 below that of Getella, thus making Getella, Arbenz's centenario, or special counselor, protector and, during cadet years, disciplinarian. The bond thus established has continued to the present day. It will therefore be seen that in any crisis Colonel Getella would be faced with conflicting loyalties -- his loyalty to Guatemala and his loyalty to Arbenz.

Mr. Plihal's factual reporting is believed to be reliable. He is particularly concerned about the Communist problem in Guatemala because of Communist activities in his shoe factory. These were reported in the Embassy's Despatch No. 558 of December 30, 1953.

Sincerely,

John E. Peurifoy

Enclosures:

Two memoranda.

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Report by George PLIHAL, a British Subject, of a Conversation between Colonel Anselmo GETELLA of the Guatemalan Army, and Ricardo HERRERA, a Guatemalan Citizen, on December 31, 1953. Information for this Report was given to Mr. Plihal by Sr. Herrera's father-in-law, Enrique ENGEL, a Guatemalan businessman.

December 31, 1953.

This unexpected visit took place this morning in the electric appliance store operated by Dick Herrera on the 6th Avenue in the Edificio Engel. At the time of the Colonel's arrival to the store Dick was absent so that the visitor had to wait for him for nearly half an hour; he did not come to see electrical appliances nor frigidaires and the visit was obviously premeditated and personal to Dick.

(Dick Herrera is about 6 years junior to the Colonel, and when in active service, was an officer in the Guatemalan Air Force. He took active part at Arbenz's side in the 1944 Revolution and for some time thereafter served as his Aide-de-camp; he was still close to him after Col. Arana's assassination, and, in fact, went up "in the air" during the Guardia de Honor's uprising to "intimidate" and "bombard"; it is widely known, however, that he and his companions dropped the bombs into "barrancos", since, as they told each other, their families were after all down below too. The two men are not close friends, but they are more than mere army acquaintances, in spite of the difference of rank and age. At any rate, it was kind of unusual for Col. A.G. to visit Dick Herrera at this time.)

After customary greetings and wishes, the conversation turned almost immediately to the situation of the country, with the Colonel asking Dick for his frank opinion of it all. Herrera did not delay to give full vent to his feelings of frustration and deep concern over the future of the country and both officers soon agreed with each other that Arbenz has now virtually barred from his inner circle all his original army friends and surrounded himself instead by communists, gangsters and thieves. And, is it not clear, Dick asked, that if Arbenz did not identify himself with such gang, that he would have said so already in very plain language? And doesn't Chemo (pet name for Anselmo) agree that Jacobo is now on the way of making himself a communist dictator? A.G. answered by saying that he is very fed up with the way "they" are trying to "thwart" all his efforts and

work in Santo Tomas by unceasing attempts to infiltrate his staff down there with communists and crooks, and asked Herrera if he did not think that Arbenz is about to make a shift to the right? to which Herrera replied that he cannot think of anyone with solid background, even among ambitious opportunists and ultra-nationalists like Alfonso Sobalvarro or Salvador Delgado who would be simpletons enough to enter his cabinet now, when he has already lost the last vestige of confidence at home and abroad. And what about Congress, he continued, what is the use of changing a dress when you leave dirty underwear on? And Herrera went on to say that he himself and a group of "discontented" army officers do not necessarily advocate a military alliance with the USA, and would have even agreed if JA had taken a neutral position for Guatemala, but they now feel that he has put the country so much out of tune with the Western World that it must eventually bring ruin to the country and to themselves, and a catastrophe in case of war.

A.G. agreed with Dick along these thoughts and said yes, "if he keeps on he will bring us to the ruin with him" and reminiesced some more about the sinister communist interference which inevitably sprang up in all the clean-up jobs he ever undertook, and conversation was carried on some more along similar lines.

In reporting the "highlights" of this conversation, special care was taken to note well most significant points. The knowledge of this conversation came to me from the most unimpeachable source.

To assess significance of this conversation, two conclusions suggest themselves:

a) JA has lost confidence of even such old, and easy-going army friends as Dick Herrera, who once were very close to him.

b) The real purpose of the Colonel's visit to Herrera at this time appears to have been to sound him out, and by sounding him out to learn also what Dick's group of officers think; it could be that he did this sounding out at Arbenz's bidding, but it seems even more probable that he is doing a lot of thinking and soul-searching these days, for he is essentially a patriot and he has heard many disturbing things during this visit to the City; and I recall now distinctly that during my conversation with him and small intimate group on December 26, 1953, someone told him almost imploringly: "Colonel, the country needs men like you today," which statement was warmly supported by all present; he was obviously pleased and flattered, and thanked us all.

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Report by George PLIHAL, a British Subject, on the Remarks Made by Colonel Anselmo GETELLA of the Guatemalan Army, and a General Conversation at a Small Party on December 26, 1953.

December 26, 1953.

He listened to detailed information how the recent situation and conflict in Incatecu developed; it was mentioned to him that it is possible that the firm will be intervened in near future, since it is obvious that the anti-communist faction of that factory, no matter how numerous, will not be allowed to win, in which case even some violence could result, which then would justify intervention. He said "May it happen that they name me as Interventor, I will clear out all the comarades for you in no time." And later on, "you must fight hard, you must hit back hard, don't hit just to give a blow, but hit so that they will be crushed". And then, "throw off your gloves, don't hesitate to fight with all means, and as dirty as they do themselves", and he continued "I have some experience with them, in my time I fought off Pinto Usaga and that scoundrel, Morales Cubas, and they know there is no monkey business with me. I told them to go to the devil", and then again, "and if Victor Manuel threatens you, tell him to go to hell, and also Fanjul, and if necessary also Jacobo".

Someone around recorded to him his activities as head of Fincas Nacionales, after Mariano Arevalo was kicked out, and he said "There, amigo, I confronted 2,000 thieves, all the cars and trucks belonging to the department gone, in service of politicians and 'chiquilines' and all that had to be brought back, and I put stop to it." And he added that soon he had all the partidos oficiales on his neck, screaming to have him removed.

He then mentioned the time he had to act in connection with the IRCA, and he mentioned that he has made some very good friends there - I cannot be sure if he mentioned also amongst them Harold Haase and Tom Bradshaw, and did not want to ask such question.

Someone around then mentioned the unnecessary scarcity of telephones in the city, saying that they could sell tomorrow 10,000 new phones with greatest ease, to which he replied: yes, they will not, because they will not get into the country so soon another "Frutera" who would be willing to sink millions in the country without any guarantees whatsoever.

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At that instant a chap called Morales said that the greatest fault there is undoubtedly that of the United States and its present Government, to which our friend A.G. made a flattering remark regarding the President of the USA saying that he is proceeding perhaps cautiously but firmly, and that he likes what he is doing; someone then mentioned "What a shame that the new American Ambassador does not speak Spanish- it will take him a long time to understand us - to which someone else replied, "Yes, but we know he speaks Greek", which caused general laughter and to which A.G. added "I understand he is a very able and "astuto" man." He made many other remarks showing his absolute distaste for the matters in Guatemala as they are today, which I will not try to quote for fear of not being able to do it as accurately as I would wish.

But, all in all, these are my impressions of the man today:

a) He is scrupulously honest and hates graft.

b) He dislikes intensely politicians and political parties, and he passionately hates communism.

c) He is a patriot, who I feel tends to put his country and its welfare above anything else.

d) He is frustrated, discontented and apparently has no faith that the country can go on much longer under the present circumstances.

There are several other circumstances that I must mention, all from most truthworthy sources:

1) The Government owed him pay for 2 months; part of it was paid to him in the week of Xmas Day, and he was told not to expect more until around middle of January.

2) He mentioned to a close friend that Maruca (Mrs. Arbenz) was also trying to get some of the funds allotted to his work in Santo Tomas for her own needs and that he put a strong opposition to that. She resents him.

3) He was also among those officers who were offered some time ago very cheaply building lot on the Ave. Reforma; he refused absolutely any such "gift". It is even said that his wife does not buy in the Officers' commissary.

4) He was always given by various Governments such tough jobs or assignments where absolute honesty and integrity was needed, such as first, Chief of Police under Arbenz, then Director of "Fincas Nacionales," then Chief of the Presidential Staff, and finally, Government representative in Santo Tomas. It is also known, however, that he is never allowed to clean up completely any one of these dependencies, since the Government political friends always get him out, sooner or later. This fact chiefly has contributed to his today's frustration and loss of confidence in J.A.

5) He stated to the same close friend, that in the case of Fincas Nacionales he secured there, when he took over, help of one of the accountants, who, although himself involved in graft, helped him to uncover lot of mud; he just scorns at the protestations of Mariano Arevalo, who it seems propagates around the city that he has not "stolen" anything, that he is in fact a very poor man. It must be expected that he will speak out about these and other matters, when the time comes.

STANDARD FORM NO. 64

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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : MID - ~~Mr. Leddy~~

DATE: July 14, 1954

FROM : BI - Mr. Bowers

SUBJECT:

Returned herewith is Ambassador Peurifoy's letter of January 5, 1954 and its two enclosures. This type of information is most useful to BI. The Ambassador's characterization of Colonel Anselmo Cetella was entirely new material.

In the past, this Division has been fortunate in having Desk Officers pass on to us information contained in Official-Informal letters from the Embassies which contribute to a picture of a personality. Your interest in the work of this Division is most appreciated.

Attachment: as stated.

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